

Better farming takes edge off drought

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Dryland corn improvement over crops in 1930s

Some farmers, who remember how drought desiccated crops in the 1930s, claim this year is the worst they've seen.

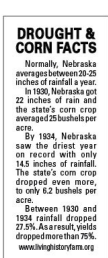
That may be so, according to Monsanto Learning Center manager Chandler Mazour, but there's still a bright side.

"Farmers harvesting dryland corn 20 to 30 years ago wouldn't have any corn this year," Mazour said.

That's because of improved farming techniques such as conservation of water and use of better hybrids to help ward off drought and protect plants from insects, he said.

At the learning center, Mazour said corn planted with Monsanto's DroughtGard system looks favorable.

Hybrids, containing DroughtGard, will be available for planting next spring.



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Mazour said the system combines strong, drought-tolerant genetics and biotech traits to make the corn plant more hydro efficient.

When used in combination with agronomic recommendations, he said the plant is designed to enhance yield stability.

Unfortunately, Mazour said some droughts are so severe that even a world-class genetics system can fail.

“If there’s no rain for two years, it won’t work,” Mazour said. “This system won’t allow you to plant in the Sahara Desert and not irrigate.”

According to the National Weather Service website, more than a century of U.S. weather records indicate three or four major drought events during that period.

Two, the 1930s Dust Bowl drought and another in the 1950s, each lasted five to seven years and covered large areas of the continental United States, including Nebraska.

These days, the three-month outlook for rain and snow in the area is bleak.

Add that to the last 15 months of little or no precipitation and it’s scary, Mazour said.

“We came into last spring with some stored soil moisture, more in some place than others,” he said. “But if this pattern continues into next year, dryland ag in the high plains could really take a beating.”

Mazour pointed to eight-foot root pits dug in learning center fields that show very little soil moisture.

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“It will be interesting to see how long it takes to replenish the soil,” he said. “We need almost two weeks of rainy London weather for the moisture to soak in.”

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